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In The News

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Defense officials today announced the establishment of U.S. Northern Command as part of the changes in the Unified Command Plan.

At a Pentagon press briefing, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the plan the most sweeping set of changes since the unified command system was set up in 1946.

"(The plan) realigns and streamlines U.S. military structure to better address 21st century threats," Rumsfeld said. For the first time, commanders' areas of operations cover the entire Earth.

The biggest change is U.S. Northern Command. The new command will stand up Oct. 1, 2002, at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo. The NORTHCOM commander will be responsible for homeland defense and also serve as head of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, a U.S.-Canada command. The current NORAD commander is also the commander of U.S. Space Command, also at Peterson. That command will not go away, but it will have a separate four-star officer heading it.

NORTHCOM's area of operations will include the United States, Canada, Mexico, parts of the Caribbean and the contiguous waters in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

"The new commander will be responsible for land, aerospace and sea defenses of the United States," Rumsfeld said. "He will command U.S. forces that operate within the United States in support of civil authorities." The command will provide civil support not only in response to attacks, but for natural disasters.

NORTHCOM takes the homeland defense role from the U.S. Joint Forces Command. JFCOM's Joint Task Force Civil Support and related activities will report to NORTHCOM.

JFCOM headquarters are in Norfolk, Va. The command will retain its mission as a "force generator" to the geographical commands. The change will free the command to focus on its mission of helping to transform the U.S. military. This includes experimentation, innovation, improving interoperability and reviewing, validating and writing joint doctrine and preparing battle-ready joint forces and coordinating joint training, simulation and modeling.

The current commander of Joint Forces Command is dual-hatted as NATO's supreme allied commander, Atlantic. That alliance command will be split off, and U.S. officials will consult with NATO allies to see how they want this handled.

U.S. European Command will increase its area of responsibility, Myers said. EUCOM will include the remainder of the Atlantic area off the East Coast to the shores of the Europe, he said, and it will pick up primary responsibility for Russia. Previously, Russian relations were handled in the Pentagon.

"Russia's new status will give them the best of both worlds," Myers said. "They will have a command close by geographically that can deal with our military-to-military relationship on a daily basis and still maintain a dialogue with Washington."

The change allows more cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and Russian

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militaries, Myers said. "It is one more signal that our post-Cold War relationship is improving," he said.

Myers said U.S. Central Command and U.S. Southern Command would remain as is. U.S. Pacific Command will help European Command with the far eastern part of Russia and will add Antarctica to its area of responsibility.

One anomaly is Alaska. NORTHCOM will cover the state, but the troops based there will be earmarked for PACOM.

Myers said the Space, Transportation, Strategic, and Special Operations commands will not change right now. "We are, however, looking to the possible merger of Space Command and Strategic Command, and a study of that is under way," he said. The results of the study will go to Rumsfeld later this year.

Both Rumsfeld and Myers emphasized that DoD's most important mission is to defend the U.S. homeland. "The changes made to the Unified Command Plan will help us to defend, to transform and to help us stand solidly with our friends and allies across the globe," Rumsfeld said.

The chairman is responsible for reviewing the Unified Command Plan on a three-year cycle. The plan announced today is early and in response to the changed world since Sept. 11.

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